

Message Text

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ACTION H-03

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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

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TAGS: OREP CASC ETRD UR

SUBJECT: OFFICIAL TRAVEL AND INTOURIST-ATA DIFFICULTIES

REF: (A) MOSCOW 15964, (B) MOSCOW 16246 (C) STATE 234319,
(D) STATE 236057, (E) STATE 242943

1. SUMMARY: INTOURIST HAS REFUSED TO HONOR VOUCHERS FROM AMERICAN TRAVEL ASSOCIATION (ATA) FOR A GROUP OF TOURISTS (REF A) AND FOR MEMBERS OF A CONGRESSIONAL STAFFDEL (REF B). INTOURIST HAS TOLD EMBOFF THAT THE PROBLEM AROSE BECAUSE ATA OWES SEVERAL THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS TO INTOURIST AND HAS NOT PAID DESPITE CABLES AND PHONE CALLS. ONE INTOURIST OFFICIAL SUGGESTED THAT WE SWITCH OFFICIAL TRAVEL TO A DIFFERENT COMPANY. ACTION REQUESTED: EMBASSY WOULD APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT'S CONTACTING ATA AND INFORMING US HOW AND WHEN PROBLEM IS RESOLVED. END SUMMARY.

2. INTOURIST OFFICIALS HAVE TOLD HOTELS NOT TO ACCEPT ATA VOUCHERS BECAUSE OF PAYMENTS ARREARS. WHEN EMBOFF SOUGHT FURTHER INFORMATION AS A RESULT OF DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY STAFFDEL, INTOURIST (MR. BAGROV OF AMERICA DESK AT THE CENTRAL OFFICE) REPLIED THAT DECISION WAS BASED ON FACT THAT ATA OWED INTOURIST SEVERAL THOUSAND DOLLARS AND HAD NOT PAID DESPITE REPEATED CABLES AND PHONE CALLS.

3. EMBOFF EXPRESSED HIS UNDERSTANDING OF WHY SUCH DEVELOPMENT COULD BE A PROBLEM BUT HE REMINDED BAGROV THAT INTOURIST (MR. SATAROV, ALSO OF THE AMERICAN DESK) HAD ASSURED THE

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EMBASSY (IN THE PERSON OF AN FSL IN ADMIN-MISCELLANEOUS

SERVICES) THAT EVERYTHING WAS ALL RIGHT FOR THE STAFFDEL'S VISIT. BAGROV REPLIED THAT INTOURIST HAD PHONED ATA VP JOHN MAHON ON THE EVE OF THE STAFFDEL'S ARRIVAL, AND HE HAD ASSURED INTOURIST THAT FUNDS TO COVER THE VISIT WOULD BE SENT. WHEN FUNDS STILL HAD NOT ARRIVED AFTER SEVERAL MORE DAYS, INTOURIST BEGAN TO REFUSE TO ACCEPT ATA VOUCHERS.

4. EMBOFF SAID EMBASSY WOULD HAVE APPRECIATED BEING INFORMED OF THE PROBLEM SOONER AS SOME ALTERNATIVE TO PERSONAL PAYMENT MIGHT HAVE BEEN WORKED OUT. AFTER SOME DISCUSSION BAGROV AGREED THAT INTOURIST COULD INFORM THE EMBASSY IF IT AGAIN ENCOUNTERED SIMILAR PROBLEMS WITH ATA. BAGROV ASKED THAT THE EMBASSY BRING PRESSURE TO BEAR ON ATA TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM OF OVERDUE PAYMENTS AND SUGGESTED THAT THE DEPARTMENT USE A DIFFERENT COMPANY FOR OFFICIAL TRAVEL. EMBOFF SAID HE UNDERSTOOD THAT OFFICIAL TRAVEL WAS FUNNELED THROUGH ATA AS A RESULT OF ARRANGEMENTS WORKED OUT WITH INTOURIST, BUT HE SAID HE WAS SURE THE DEPARTMENT WOULD BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE SITUATION AS DESCRIBED BY BAGROV. BAGROV AGAIN SUGGESTED THAT WE SWITCH COMPANIES, ASSERTING THAT ATA WAS ON THE EDGE OF BANKRUPTCY AND WAS IN THE PROCESS OF TRYING TO SELL THE COMPANY.

5. ACTION REQUESTED: EMBASSY WOULD APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT'S CONTACTING ATA TO ASCERTAIN THE DIMENSIONS OF THE PROBLEM AND INFORMING US HOW AND WHEN IT IS RESOLVED BECAUSE WE WISH TO BE KNOWLEDGEABLE THE NEXT TIME THE SUBJECT COMES UP WITH INTOURIST.

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